

# THE MORAL DIMENSION OF STRATEGY

by

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One uses the word "moral" with fear and trembling in any serious discussion of national strategy. We all think we know what the word means, but in our pluralistic society there is usually sharp disagreement about specific moral judgments. We see the determination of right and wrong as an individual obligation. By tradition and by constitutional mandate, we resist any attempt to sanctify the values of any of the various moral theories and systems which inform American culture, just as we refuse to allow the establishment of any particular religious tradition as the official American way.

Nevertheless, from time to time and on specific issues, a large majority of Americans have come to agree that some policies are right and some are wrong. And those judgments are based on a tradition of social values which have an identifiable content, which can be and have been described, and which have a powerful impact on the formation of public opinion and its judgments on national policy.

Americans tend to apply their own personal moral norms to the policies and actions of nations, others as well as our own. Such judgments tend to be too simple and to confuse real moral issues with moralistic judgments, because individual norms are not as easily realizable as our traditional idealists imagine when applied to international relations. Public officials, unlike individuals, are not free to renounce the nation's self-interest. But that insight only makes the moral dimension of strategy more, not less, important.

The requirement to protect the national interest involves officials in a means/ends dilemma of such complexity that prudence is apt to be a greater virtue than the individual's moralistic sense, however defined, would allow. Charles Frankel, philosopher and former Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, raises the question of means and ends in foreign policy as one of "whether it is better to be decent and lose or practical and win."<sup>1</sup> He would also support its reversal, asking whether it is better to be practical and lose or to be decent

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and win, since there is a belief in America, often held to stem from our Puritan past, that justice is bound to triumph in the long run.

**S**eymour Lipset, a noted sociologist, describes our moralistic tendency well in an article he calls "The Paradox of American Politics."<sup>2</sup> Nor is he the first observer to note the peculiar role that moral values play in American life and national strategy.

With characteristic insight and irony, the late Reinhold Niebuhr, a theologian whose *Moral Man and Immoral Society* powerfully influenced a generation of American strategists including Dean Acheson and George Kennan, pointed out the ethical paradox of patriotism, regardless of whether based on secular or religious content: its transmutation of individual unselfishness into national egoism.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon, in his view, makes hypocrisy the most significant moral characteristic of nations in carrying out controversial policies. Such a hypocritical situation can be dangerous for strategists because it renders the mobilization of national effort and will vulnerable to changes in the perception of strategy as it unfolds. This is especially so in a democracy, where freedom of opinion and its expression is itself a normative cultural value protected by law and custom.

Frankel says:

For better or worse, a foreign policy will not be effective over the long run if public opinion does not support it; and since public opinion cannot be expected to have an informed judgment on each specific decision taken day-by-day, its assent has to be to the general tendency and direction of the policy—to its guiding principles. This is a prudential principle, but it is also one that goes to the integrity and vitality of a democratic system.<sup>4</sup>

Niebuhr also pointed out that the individual's unselfish impulses are not free from the taint of self-interest. In national crises, therefore,

... The nation's claim to uniqueness comes into ... conflict with the generally accepted impression that the nation is the incarnation of universal values. This conflict can be resolved only by deception. In the imagination of the simple patriot, the nation is not *a* society, but *Society*. [Emphasis added] Though its values are relative they appear, from his naive perspective, to be absolute.<sup>5</sup>

In a world with ever more rapid communications and increasingly more significant forums for the formation of world opinion, national self-deception is harder to sustain. The powerful impulse to self-righteousness which results from national self-deception complicates the task of diplomacy, especially its military aspects. War dramatically calls into question the absolute character of a free nation's perception of its values, yet depends on them most heavily and mobilizes them most effectively.

**T**he interaction of war and national values is a phenomenon to which military strategists of the western democracies must pay closer attention. Most of the public debate over national defense policy centers on weapons systems and budgets, and invites the unanswerable question, "How much is enough?" Yet the power of value concerns is such that they can be, when mobilized either in support of or in opposition to military

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power, the decisive dimension of strategy. Our Vietnam experience, regardless of one's feelings or value judgments on its outcome, illustrates the way a population's value perceptions become a powerful influence on who wins and who loses. So far, Communist strategists appear to have learned better than we that the moral dimension of strategy is changing the nature of international conflict. That conflict is no longer a purely governmental affair.

The late Hannah Arendt, perhaps the best known western student of revolution, criticized—in an interesting way—the notion that war is a form of relations between governments:

In the contest that divides the world today, those will probably win who understand revolution, while those who still put their faith in power politics in the traditional sense of the term and, therefore, *in war as the last resort of all foreign policy* [emphasis added] may well discover in a not too distant future that they have become masters in a rather useless and obsolete trade.<sup>6</sup>

While her view of war as “the last resort of *all* foreign policy” was too sweeping, there is much to commend her reasoning for this predicted obsolescence. In her view, the revolutionary cause of freedom is the only one which can justify the prosecution of violence in the minds of most of the people who are called on to fight wars. Counterrevolutionary enterprises, on the other hand, require commitment to values that are essentially repressive and quite contrary to our own dominant ideas of freedom and equality.

Both Niebuhr and Arendt agree that political violence, in the form either of war or revolution, requires for its successful pursuit the mobilization of a moral consensus on the legitimacy of both the objectives of violence and the means by which these objectives are pursued. This insight is not uniquely civilian nor political; it has been clearly expressed by then-Major General Robert G. Gard, writing in *Adelphi Paper No. 103*:

Military forces must be employed in a manner consistent with societal values; for in modern democracies, legitimacy of means has become a paramount factor.<sup>7</sup>

Homogenous societies, especially those whose governments have eliminated or neutralized political opposition, find it relatively easy to mobilize and appeal to normative cultural values. Societies in which communication is open, which safeguard pluralism with legal sanctions, and which normally tolerate a high degree of political dissent find it much more difficult to develop and maintain a consensus of commitment to the legitimacy of strategic objectives. Yet the maintenance of that consensus is one of the key objectives of national strategy, in both a political and a military sense, for when it fails, the war is lost.

#### MORAL VALUES

Cultural (moral) values are decisive to the formulation and prosecution of national strategy because the process by which they are formed is so closely linked to those social interactions which constitute the process of individual personal growth and which determine who people think they are. Questions and issues of personal identity are therefore the most powerful of the motivating forces which influence human behavior.

Individuals do not arrive at conclusions about who they are in a vacuum. They learn to identify themselves through a very complicated process of relating to others—first, by imitation of their parents and siblings, then their extended families, and later through their experiences with both private and public groups and institutions. In this process they identify themselves with some groups, align themselves against others, and finally come to perceive themselves as “somebody,” and as members of a nation-state. The nation-state then embodies as tradition those values which the majority of its members perceive to be common to the society. They are often institutionalized not only in the nation's history and documents, but also in its living organizations.

The process of developing this identity on the individual level includes choices we make about how to behave, what to believe, and how human affairs ought to be regulated and conducted. At the group level we accept or reject a consensus, often ill-defined but yet quite real, about these choices which we call values. These values then influence later choices and decisions, such as attitudes taken on issues of public and political significance, to include how the nation ought to conduct its business at home and abroad.

Robert Kennedy, a political scientist in the Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College, has developed a thesis which outlines the details of how this process works in the formation of a spirit of nationalism.<sup>8</sup> The satisfaction of individual needs by the external environment, which is composed of individuals and groups, results in the formation of value judgments (attitudes and beliefs). An individual will tend to internalize his environment to the extent that it satisfies his needs. Moreover, he will internalize, in the form of attitudes and beliefs, the values of the environment which serve his physiological and psychogenic requirements. Such values, along with needs, serve as the ingredients of a perceptual screen through which all activities external to the self (in the environment) are judged. Value systems thus come to be a primary element of each person's perceptual screen, since they are the mechanism providing content for familiarity, identification, rejection, and internalization.

Niebuhr has observed one aspect of this process in describing the moral dimensions of patriotism in wartime, one of the values we will address:

Unquestionably, there is an alloy of projected self-interest in patriotic altruism. The man in the street, with his lust for power and prestige thwarted by his own limitations and the necessities of social life, projects his ego upon his nation and indulges his anarchic lusts vicariously.<sup>9</sup>

Niebuhr's is a somewhat intuitive approach to an observed social phenomenon. The

scientific approach to a study of social values is still in its infancy. Consequently a great deal of effort is expended by scholars on precise definitions as a prerequisite for careful measurement. The only level at which agreement has been reached is a very general one, not much beyond the dictionary definition of "value" as "something held in esteem for intrinsic or utilitarian reasons."<sup>10</sup>

For our purposes a precise definition is not required. Social values are those commonly held beliefs, arising both from tradition and from institutional norms, which help us to choose from among possible courses of action that one which promises the most satisfaction. Our concern is with motivation and therefore with identity. Consequently values are those commonly held attitudes about the way things ought to be and the basis on which we decide the desirability or undesirability of possible courses of public action.

#### AMERICAN VALUE ORIENTATIONS

Robin Williams, a noted theorist of social change, has attempted to categorize American social attitudes. His research identifies 15 "value configurations."<sup>11</sup> They are more integrative than definitive, but a listing is necessary for our purposes. He finds that we have a central stress upon personal *achievement and success*, which values action and the mastering of one's environment. *Activity and work* are a related category of behavior important to Americans, who display a marked drive to actively shape and control their environment. Americans also have a *moral orientation*, a tendency to judge events and conduct in terms of an absolute standard of good and evil, variously understood. A closely related outlook, *humanitarianism* describes the American emphasis on disinterested concern and helpfulness, to include personal kindness and sympathy for the underdog. *Efficiency and practicality* are also highly valued, as are *progress* and *material comfort*. One of the most deeply embedded and highly prized values is *equality*, whether of status or opportunity, as a universal and inherited

right, with its corollary *freedom*, in the sense of liberty and independence. Another dimension of experience is tapped by our tendency to value *conformity*, at least to demand and enforce it by sanction in terms of social behavior in an external sense. *Science and secular rationality* are also values deeply embedded in the American social psyche, as are *nationalism/patriotism* and *democracy*. The latter means, among other things, the rejection of aristocratic and monarchical principles, to be replaced by a "participant, civic minded" culture. Our culture is also permeated by a heavy emphasis on the importance of *individual personality*, viewed as something of intrinsic worth and safeguarded by the Bill of Rights itself. We have also been characterized from our very beginnings by *racism and related group-superiority* themes, widespread and deeply held, but on a regional basis in terms of their particular content.

These 15 "value orientations" describe the specific content of our normative cultural value system, according to Williams. A summary classification would look like this:

In the first place, there are the *quasi-values* or *gratifications*, taken at a hedonistic or psychological level, implicit in the entire analysis and especially important in the section on 'material comfort.' Second, we may identify the *instrumental interests* or *means values*; for example, wealth, power, work, efficiency. Although these interests may become values in themselves, it is convenient to consider them primarily as instrumental to the achievement of other values. Third, we have the *formal-universalistic values* of Western tradition: rationalism, impersonal justice and universalistic ethics, achievement, democracy, equality, freedom, certain religious values, value of individual personality. Fourth, there is a class of particularistic, segmental, or *localistic evaluations*, that are best exemplified in racist-ethnic superiority doctrines and in some (not all) aspects of nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

It is readily apparent that not all these value orientations are mutually compatible or supportive. Williams is careful to point out the complexity of the interaction modes among them; they nearly defy description, a problem intensified by the pluralistic character of the society as well as the values themselves. Gratifications are frequently in competition with, if not antithetical to, the instrumental interests. More seriously, for strategy makers, the "formal-universalistic values of Western culture" may be practically incompatible. For instance, more freedom means less equality; achievement (and recognition for it) reduces our sense of being equals; the more impersonal justice is, the less it can take into account the worth of individual personality; rationalism conflicts with some basic religious values for more than a few of the major religious traditions; freedom, democracy, equality, universalistic ethics, and many others are quite incompatible with doctrines of ethnic superiority. Any society as pluralistic as ours must expect such diversity in its value orientations, and indeed our political institutions were purposely designed to cope with just such a situation.<sup>13</sup>

**T**he need to make choices among various possible behavior alternatives, and the tendency of those choices to follow patterns which are peculiar to particular cultures, led Talcott Parsons, a very influential social theorist, to categorize those cultural values which govern behavior choices in terms of "pattern variables." What he calls pattern variables describe the dilemmas which members of any given culture experience in five different kinds of situations requiring choice: the gratification-discipline dilemma, the private versus collective interest dilemma, the choice between "types" of value standards (my own versus the group's), the choice between "modalities" of the social object (the choice between judging on the basis of performance or status), and the choices which depend on one's degree of interest in the object of the choice.

Seymour Lipset has adapted these pattern

variables as a framework within which to analyze the United States in comparison with three other Western democratic cultures—England, Canada, and Australia. He finds that American cultural values are oriented toward achievement, equalitarianism, universalism, and specificity.

More than any other modern non-Communist industrial nation, the United States emphasizes achievement, equalitarianism, universalism, and specificity. This combination of variables is functional for a stable democracy. The normative system allows or encourages the upper classes to accept improvements in the status and power of the lower classes *without feeling morally offended*. Since all men and groups are expected to try to improve their positions vis-a-vis others, success by a previously deprived group is not resented as deeply as in countries whose values stress the moral worth of ascription. Similarly, the emphasis on equalitarianism, universalism and specificity means that men can expect, and with limits do receive, fair treatment according to their merits. Lower class individuals and groups desiring to change their social position *need not be revolutionary*. The dominant values of the society legitimize their aspirations. . . . Class consciousness lies fallow, because [it] is in part an adaptation to the behavior of the upper class in societies characterized by ascription, elitism, particularism and diffuseness. The latter values imply that men must stay in their class positions and that they will be treated by others and will treat each other diffusely in terms of class status. American values reject treating an individual in terms of class status, but support interaction with him in terms of his role as a worker in one situation, a suburban dweller in another, as a member of the American Legion in a third, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

Put differently, American value orientations evidence an overwhelming

tendency (more so than the other democracies studied) to judge people and events by a universal moral standard, to ascribe virtue to achievement at the expense of status (we esteem people because they have performed well, rather than because they hold office), to believe that each man is as important as every other (I am as good as you are even though you may be a general and I a private), and to value functions rather than positions. These are not easy value orientations for an army to live with, since its hierarchical nature, authoritarian practices, personnel policies, and even its function (inevitably requiring violence)—all express value orientations which are both legitimate and necessary, but quite antithetical to those of the culture in which it lives.

#### VALUE CHANGES

These orientations are also in some sense the content of the perceptual screen through which the American public perceives and evaluates foreign societies because, as Niebuhr pointed out, we tend to absolutize our own cultural values. The value "patriotism" is not only a part of the content of this perceptual screen, it is also in some ways a product of the way the perceptual screen works. Our universalistic orientation tends to subordinate patriotism/nationalism to the values of humanitarianism, efficiency, practicality, equality, freedom, democracy, and the cult of individual personality—these are the *content* of our patriotism, which is something of a separate and dependent virtue in our culture. Our universalistic orientation tends to inhibit the "my country, right or wrong" response to international issues, and our pluralistic (constitutionally safeguarded) nature both encourages and protects those who dissent from official policy.

Students of cultural values have noted a decline in patriotism/nationalism in recent years, and some predict a further decline in the future. Nicholas Rescher conducted a questionnaire study in 1966 on *Changes in US Values*, which asked a group of behavioral science professors to predict what directions a change in traditional American values might take.

One striking aspect of the responses to this question is the respondent's firm anticipation of substantial changes with respect to the espousal of specific values: with respect to half the items (eighteen of twenty-seven) the consensus is for a probable change. Almost always, the anticipated change is in an upward direction; there are only three exceptions, the subjects of these downward trends being items 7 ("self-reliance"), 20 ("devotion to family"), and 31 ("patriotism").<sup>15</sup>

The significance of the finding is not just the decline of patriotism—it is the connection between the anticipation of a positive increase in the more traditionally democratic values and the decline of patriotism. The surveyed group, of course, represents a very selective profession, heavily committed to the values of rationalism and progress.

It would be a mistake to discount these results, however. Daniel Yankelovich has done a longitudinal survey (covering a seven-year interval on an annual basis) published under the title *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the Seventies*. His findings tend to confirm Rescher's but from a totally different population sample—both college and noncollege youth 17-24 years of age. He says:

*Changing Attitudes Toward War as National Policy*

The Vietnam War and the New Values on campus have combined to leave a permanent mark on the views of American young people regarding war as an instrument of national policy.

Four years ago, in 1969, six out of ten high school students, members of the working class, the unemployed, and other young people under the age of 25 felt that it was worthwhile to fight a war to counteract aggression (67 percent), contain communism (69 percent), protect our national interests (66 percent), and fight for our honor (59 percent). At least half felt it was also worthwhile to fight a war to protect our allies or maintain our

position of power in the world. Today, only one out of two of noncollege youth consider counteracting aggression (53 percent), containing communism (50 percent), or protecting our national interests (49 percent), fighting for our honor (43 percent), or maintaining our position of power in the world (40 percent). The two largest differences between the viewpoints of noncollege and college youth are in their attitudes toward wars to contain communism (noncollege 50 percent, college 30 percent) and fighting for our honor (noncollege, 43 percent, college 19 percent).<sup>16</sup>

From the standpoint of military strategy, it is not important to know whether these value orientation shifts are temporary or permanent, short or long range. The impact they have on strategy is the same; the recent behavior of Congress in the foreign policy field is evidence of the seriousness with which they must be taken by strategists. With that in mind, we must now turn to a more specific consideration of the impact of these values on strategy.

## STRATEGY AND VALUES

Walter Millis, Raymond Aron, and Bernard Brodie, among others, have outlined the history and development of war, both as a social phenomenon and as a mechanism for political change. All have pointed out that in the twentieth century, war has tended to require the mobilization of the total resources, both human and material, of participating nations; and that the military aims have frequently displaced the political goals of those nations. Even those military actions America has fought since the end of the Second World War, in which we did not make an effort to mobilize totally and which we called "limited wars," were not limited in the same sense that the European wars of the eighteenth century and earlier were. The North Koreans and the North Vietnamese had essentially unlimited purposes; our own political purposes in those encounters were



either unclear or subject to change as the fighting gathered momentum. Both encounters fomented great debates within our society during and after their prosecution.

Hannah Arendt believed that "the end of war is revolution." By that she seemed to mean not only that the outcome of war is revolution, but also that revolution is a more effective political instrument than war. She noted that since World War II, wars—no matter what the proclaimed goal of the protagonists may have been—have generally resulted in the overthrow or displacement of the nonrevolutionary governments involved. In the case of the western democracies, displacement refers to a constitutional process and might more accurately be called a change of parties in power. World War II saw the victorious Allies change all the axis governments as well as those of the countries which Germany had occupied. The Labor Party also came to power in England, many believe as a result of the war. Korea and Vietnam both resulted in a change in American governing parties, and in both cases the war was the overriding political issue. Perhaps these changes are a rough estimate of which side won what was, in each case, an essentially military stalemate by the time American involvement ended. The French experience in Vietnam and Algeria also bears out Arendt's thesis, and the Arab-Israeli wars of the sixties do so in part.

Arendt's claim of the displacement of war by revolution confirms Clausewitz's theory of war. He saw relations between states as a continuation of sometimes competing and sometimes coalescing interests, not as absolutely opposite conditions. That is the meaning of his famous dictum about war and politics. Niebuhr once observed that the most stable peace we can know in history is still a very delicate balance of tendencies toward war. But America's cultural past and her privileged position both in time and in space, protected while she developed by the preoccupation of the great powers with other interests and by the ocean barriers which helped keep her free from the fear of invasion, have served us badly in their conjunction. We have learned to make a

nearly absolute distinction between the states of war and peace as *conditions* in human affairs, rather than recognizing them as poles on the continuum of international relations which, like flowers and seeds, contain each other's genes.

**T**his nearly absolute distinction has also had its impact on civil-military relations within our culture. Our citizenry and our historic documents view the military establishment in peacetime as a necessary evil, and in wartime as a heroic class—at least that was the tendency until the Korean War. Military leaders are expected to keep themselves strictly subordinate to civilian authorities in peacetime. In wartime one hears admonitions that politicians must not interfere with the generals' conduct of the war—certainly from MacArthur and his supporters in Korea, and as lately as *A Soldier Reports* by General William C. Westmoreland, although the latter is much more subdued. This dichotomy in our cultural orientation between war and peace has served to obscure the primacy of political purposes in war, and has encouraged the absolutizing of military aims once the shooting begins, without any healthy or searching examination of the ways they need to be connected to insure success. "Winning" the war has been seen by the military—and often to a high degree by political administrations as well as large segments of the electorate—as the total overthrow of enemy forces, removal of the "bad" enemy government, and substitution of a group of governors more congenial to American value orientations. These are not really political purposes: unconditional surrender is a statement of a military aim, not a political purpose. The legacy of World War II, and the political confusion of Europe in its aftermath (when Russia filled the vacuum that our lack of political purpose created, and we hurried to build NATO with the Marshall Plan) have served to confuse us ever since about the political purposes of war.

Henry Brandon reports an exchange during the Johnson administration which illuminates the problem of purpose and aim in controlling the violence of war and making it serve some

useful social purpose. After the Tet offensive, the President sought a review of the war from elder statesmen outside his administration:

Then the senior statesmen had lunch with the President. Dean Acheson, who sat next to Mr. Johnson, offered to lead off the discussion, and Johnson agreed. Acheson warned him that what he was going to say might cause pandemonium, but again the President encouraged him. Acheson then summed up his impressions of the discouraging briefings they had had, the heavy military losses, the damage to the Saigon Government's authority, and the disarray in the pacification program.

To Acheson's surprise, his views were shared by more among those present than he had expected. The one who mattered most, because he too had been a strong supporter of the war, was McGeorge Bundy. He summed up for those supporting Acheson's views and admitted, in self-flagellating mood, that 'for the first time in my life I find myself agreeing on this issue with George Ball.'

General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was unconvincing in his presentation of his own views and in his inability to define his objectives in the war. (He later pointedly asked what sort of a 'jerk' had briefed the 'wise men.' Some of them thereafter worried about the briefers' future.)

When the President was asked what his objectives were, he was not very persuasive either. He simply repeated what he had already enunciated in public speeches.<sup>17</sup>

What is significant in this exchange, confirmed by other reporters,<sup>18</sup> is the lack of ability of both civilian and military authorities to articulate to each other an achievable political purpose and a clearly consistent military aim. Perhaps because of this confusion, we were not clear about the enemy's center of gravity. The President and the bombing advocates in general saw the

center of gravity as North Vietnam's willingness to persist in the south. What the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops were jealously preserving, however, and the strategy which gave the Commander, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) his desperate problem, was the relationship between the Viet Cong and the local peasants. Their regular NVA units sought to keep MACV off balance to preserve this center of gravity, which rested more on "moral" (in the sense of "value") than on material considerations. On the other hand, both our political purposes and our military aims, when they were articulated, were couched in the less than convincing terms of the Korean War: resisting aggression and safeguarding freedom. The lack of concreteness in such terminology made them more slogans than bases for effective military planning and strategy.

**T**hat both the wars in Korea and Vietnam have been ambiguous in terms of American public acceptance of their political purposes is a somewhat mild description in view of the political turmoil they occasioned. One possible reason is the plain fact that neither conflict clearly represented a struggle for values that Americans hold deeply as their own cultural heritage.

Granted that Asian cultural values are quite different from our own, both wars were defended by the American Government in power as struggles by an attacked country for the right of self-determination. Over the course of the fighting, however, public opinion shifted as the reporting of events made it clear that the dominant characteristics of the governments we were supporting were, if not repugnant, at least unattractive by American standards.

To the extent that these societies were portrayed as ones in which social privilege was based on rank or nepotism rather than achievement and ability; allied public officials were portrayed as more concerned with personal gain than with public service; peasants were portrayed as regimented and persecuted for their political or religious views; and an elitist view of colonialism

seemed to predominate, the regimes we supported were discredited in the public view and were considered not worth fighting for. In the case of Korea, a compromise with the enemy was possible; in Vietnam it was not, and the fighting efficiency of US forces apparently deteriorated. Political pressures within the society erupted to the point where abandonment of the cause, albeit through face-saving gestures, became politically necessary.

The universalistic dimension of the American cultural value orientation describes that tendency our public has to *judge* behavior by an unconditional standard of right and wrong, not necessarily to *follow* that standard. The other three dimensions (equalitarianism, achievement, and specificity) do little more than describe the various ways and modes in which our personalism and egalitarianism show themselves. When the question "what is worth fighting for?" finally arises, any answer which does not appear to be consistent with those values will lack credibility, especially in the long run. We are a nonascriptive society. Elected public officials and appointed military leaders both have to earn their credibility by performance—it does not come built in. And the duration of public legitimacy for the war policy can be very short indeed. Distinctions between short wars and long wars are misplaced—the issue is legitimacy, not endurance. From a thoroughly pragmatic standpoint, therefore, the value dimension of strategy is at the least, important, and at the most, decisive.

#### VALUE QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Clausewitz's theory about the interrelatedness of political purpose, military aim, and center of gravity in the phenomenon of war; the necessity of clearly perceiving the specific ways they connect in the formulation of national strategy; and the relevance of moral values to the whole process pose more questions than answers for a pluralistic democracy and its military strategists. The values of constitutional democracies—unlike the crusading moral fervor of revolutionary

movements of the twentieth century, with their rigid thought control apparatus and discipline—do not permit the luxury of the kinds of controls on our institutions and the media of mass communication that make the maintenance of national discipline in wartime easier. Yet the importance of the moral dimension of strategy more than ever requires a consensus of moral values to support that strategy if it is to have a reasonable chance of success. These considerations raise at least three questions for us in thinking about national strategy in the post-Vietnam era.

The first is how to achieve harmony and compatibility among the three key strategic considerations: purpose, aim, and center of gravity. Assuming that strategists and policymakers are themselves wise, learned, and broadly experienced men, a problem endemic to the harmonizing process is language. The language of strategy tends to be military currency. Diplomacy and politics each has its own lingo, and bridging the gap requires not only patience and tact on the part of collaborators, but also that they be able to articulate conflicting points of view in such a way that all sides of each issue are truly appreciated and considered, so that when decisions are reached they represent not a consensus, but the best risk available. Another problem not unrelated to that of language is the bureaucratic compartmentalization of the government in such a way that those charged with formulating and carrying out military strategy and policy would be derelict in their obligations to their own respective services if they freed themselves from the parochial outlook on strategy that is the heritage of each of our separate services. It is in many ways necessary to the formulation of sound joint strategy and planning. Our governmental machinery seems prone to produce bureaucratic compromises more often than clear-cut decisions, resulting in vague and diffuse statements of purpose which invite usurpation by military aim in the gathering momentum of war once it starts. Statements of political purpose which violate the principles of sound strategy, on the other hand, often result in restrictions on military

operations which dilute rather than concentrate effort and increase the difficulty of focusing on the enemy center of gravity. We need a forum for strategy formulation which represents service, state department, and domestic political expertise, but which is free from *institutionalized* loyalties and interests. Not every political purpose is realizable by military action; if the thesis of this paper is correct, however, only minor goals are realizable by military, diplomatic, or political action alone.

A second question, closely related to the first, is how to orchestrate the mobilization of consensual goals for national strategy. Our electoral process makes national strategy vulnerable to major shifts at frequent intervals, and subject to a great many domestic political pressures at all times. Some would argue that this is a good thing in a world that changes as rapidly as ours, and there is merit in that argument. However, considerable time is required for the public to digest and understand the general direction and tendency of national strategy, which provides a basis for their evaluation of its specific twists and turns. This cumbersome process is further complicated by the number of voices analyzing policy and helping to shape public opinion about it. A great deal depends on the ability of administration and defense officials to articulate policy goals in understandable terms that are somewhere between slogans and doctoral dissertations. Central to the question is the credibility of public officials in gaining and maintaining legitimacy for national strategy decisions. Success in mobilizing such support depends, in the final analysis, less on rhetorical brilliance than on clearly articulated and perceived congruence between the policy proposed and national moral values.

This introduces the third question raised by the contention that the moral dimension of strategy has become more important. How do we define the point at which moral values become relevant to national strategy? Some claim that moral values cannot have *any* relevance to political or strategic issues—that the realm of international affairs is by nature amoral. Others claim a simple congruence,

and want foreign policy to be based on the Sermon on the Mount. Still others recognize the problem as one of means and ends, and are sure that in any given case the end justifies the means. This last is an interesting position and potentially the most viable. On the one hand, it recognizes the relevance of moral judgments; means have to be justified, even if only by the ends they serve. On the other hand, it frequently assumes a necessary and inevitable hiatus between what is desirable and what is possible, and sanctions too easily the commission of great crimes in the name of holy causes.

The fact is that there is no way to justify the means used to achieve any social objectives, criminal or saintly, except by appeal to the ends they are intended to serve. Most means/ends disputes debate the appropriateness and necessity of the means when, in fact, a more productive and enlightening debate could be carried out over the ends. If moral values are in fact decisive for national strategy to succeed, then their proper application is first to the *goals* of that policy. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has pointed out that the purpose of national values is “to illuminate and control conceptions of national interest.”

If a course [of action] in foreign affairs implies moral values incompatible with the ideals of the national community, either the nation will refuse after a time to sustain the policy, or else it must abandon its ideals. A people is in bad trouble when it tries to keep two sets of books—when it holds one scale of values for its internal policy and another to its conduct of foreign affairs.<sup>19</sup>

That statement is a surprisingly close parallel to Clausewitz's comment about and emphasis on “moral quantities,” and the center of gravity. In practical terms for us, it means that future military strategies developed by the United States must have a political purpose and a military aim which are clearly perceived to be consistent with the American cultural and moral values discussed earlier in this paper. Military operations

themselves also will have to be planned and executed in support of such values.

It is either the genius or the curse of revolutionary movements in our century that they are perceived by their adherents, and by many disinterested parties, as being capable of preserving the necessary connection between their values and their strategy. Those values, and that strategy, are in most ways, but not all, very different from our own. Unless we can equal their wisdom, we who are professional soldiers may well discover that Arendt was correct, and that we have indeed become masters in a rather obsolete and useless trade.

#### NOTES

1. Charles Frankel, "Morality and US Foreign Policy," *Headline Series*, 224 (February 1975), 3.
2. Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Paradox of American Politics," *The Public Interest*, 41 (Fall 1975), 142-65. Lipset says: "Moralism is an orientation Americans have inherited from their Protestant past. This is the *one* (sic) country in the world dominated by the religious sects. The teachings of these denominations called on men to follow their conscience, with an unequivocal emphasis not to be found in those denominations which evolved from state churches (Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Orthodox Christians)."

3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 91.
4. Frankel, p. 36.
5. Niebuhr, p. 96.
6. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 8.
7. Robert G. Gard, Jr., "The Future of the Military Professions," *Adelphi Paper No. 103* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1973), p. 4.
8. Robert Kennedy, "Nationalism: A Salient Force" (unpublished paper, George Washington University, 1974).
9. Niebuhr, p. 93.
10. "Value," *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1967, p. 2530.
11. Robin M. Williams, Jr., *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 452-99.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 501.
13. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, 10 (1787), 77-84 and 51 (1788), 320-25. Madison was the real author of both papers.
14. Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Value Patterns of Democracy: A Case Study in Comparative Analysis," *American Sociological Review*, 28 (August 1963), 517.
15. Kurt Baier and Nicholas Rescher, eds., *Values and the Future* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 135.
16. Daniel Yankelovich, *The New Morality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 88.
17. Henry Brandon, *Anatomy of Error* (Boston: Gambit Press, 1969), pp. 133-34.
18. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972) and Neil Sheehan, ed., *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).
19. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "National Interests and Moral Absolutes," *Skeptic: The Forum for Contemporary History*, Special Issue 8 (July-August 1975), 36.

